

STATE OF COLORADO

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Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor

March 24, 2008

Hon. Michael O. Leavitt
Office of the Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Subject: Request for Assistance: Salmonella Outbreak/Alamosa, Colorado

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

The State of Colorado is currently addressing a major outbreak of Salmonella in the town of Alamosa, Colorado. Alamosa (approximate population 10,000) is the economic hub for San Luis Valley, 230 miles south of Denver.

Initial cases of salmonella were reported on March 8, 2008. To date the State has identified approximately 216 cases with 9 hospitalizations but 0 fatalities. Local and state epidemiologists and health officials have identified the most likely source of infection as the municipal water system.

Alamosa County has very limited local public health resources. In addition, the local medical system is experiencing significantly increased workload due to the number of cases. While regional mutual aid and state resources have been supporting both their and our efforts to address this public health emergency, the local resources have become overburdened, and may soon become exhausted. The state is providing significant resources across several departments, but our ability to manage this emergency also is being seriously strained.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment issued a boil/bottled water order on March 19, 2008. On March 21, 2008, I issued an executive order declaring a state of emergency for Alamosa City and County. A public health emergency was also declared. I also activated the National Guard, which currently is assisting with bulk and bottled water distribution.

Although there has been no Presidential / Stafford Act Declaration for this incident, the State of Colorado is requesting expert personnel assistance from the Department of Health and Human Services. The state has included approximate numbers and capabilities that are needed at this time to respond to the emergency in the city and county of Alamosa:

- Environmental Personnel (5): Staff should have specific demonstrated inspectoral experience in the federal food code. They would ideally have knowledge and working experience to visit retail food facilities, and wholesale food manufacturing and storage facilities. Visits will determine compliance with the bottled water guidance developed by CDPHE that are to be used during the flushing of the city's water supply and providing technical assistance/guidance;
- Epidemiologists (2): Staff will help with ongoing surveillance activities and the administration of additional community surveys that are currently being developed;
- Risk Communication Experts (2): Bilingual staff needed in Spanish and English. The population of Alamosa is 47% Hispanic, with approximately 10% of the population speaking exclusively Spanish; and
- Additional water engineers and water quality experts will potentially be needed based on the outcome of flushing the water system with Chlorine that begins March 25, 2008 at 9:00 AM.

These individuals would be based in Alamosa and work under the guidance of the CDPHE incident command. The deployment period will be approximately two weeks. The State of Colorado may be able to assist with lodging accommodations. The point of contact will be: Gerrit Bakker, Deputy Director, Emergency Preparedness and Response Division, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 303-947-4538, gerrit.bakker@state.co.us.

I want to thank you for considering this request for federal assistance. And of course, we will continue to advise you on the status of this situation.

Sincerely,



Bill Ritter, Jr.
Governor